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ABSTRACT

Brigham Young University (Utah) is developing a program to improve reflective thinking skills in preservice students. The beginning professional course includes the following reflective teaching components: (1) instruction on the theory and process of reflection; (2) participation in selected microteaching episodes; (3) reflecting on the classroom teaching performance of teachers, peers, and self in both open and theme-focused reflections; (4) writing reflection reports which are delivered orally as well as in written form; and (5) working in cooperative teams. Outcome research is being conducted on the impact of these practices on beginning and more mature students' ability to reflect. (JD)

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The Empowerment of Preservice Teachers Through Reflective Teaching

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The Empowerment of Preservice Teachers through Reflective Teaching

John Dewey (1973) was concerned with the question: "What constitutes an educative experience?" He differentiates "educative" from "miseducative" experience as follows:

> The belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean all experiences are genuinely or equally educative. Experience and education cannot be directly equated to each other. For some experiences are miseducative. Any experience is miseducative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience (p. 25).

Erdman (1983) believes Dewey's statement provides a basis for evaluating field experience programs in preservice training. The central question is whether preservice teachers become "students of education," open to reflecting about their experiences. We believe that helping students become more reflective is an important way of empowering them when they become teachers.

Dewey (1933) noted that "reflective action" is different from "routine action." Reflective action entails:

> active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it and the further consequences to which it leads (p 9).

Cruickshank (1987) has recently reemphasized Dewey's theme on reflection and has developed specific techniques to teach preservice students how to reflect on teaching practice. Cruickshank says:

> Although the most visible intention of preservice education, and a laudable one, is to prepare teachers for initial practice. . ., the major goal should be to graduate novices disposed to becoming lifelong students of teaching (p 1).
>
> Students of teaching have a high and continuing interest in the subtleties of the art and science of teaching. Specifically, they want to learn all they can about teaching from both theory and practice. They reverberate to writing and research on teaching. . . Perhaps more important, they teach and reflect on their teaching (p 2).

Vilverde (1982) provides a more operational definition of reflection:

> The [teacher] must examine his or her situation, behavior, practices, effectiveness, and accomplishments. Reflection means asking basic questions of oneself. The basic and comprehensive question during reflection is: "What am I doing and why?" Reflection is a form of slightly distorted self-evaluation--distorted in the sense that judgement is emphasized rather than data collection. The individual asks value laden questions and . . . concludes whether he or she is satisfied or dissatisfied (p 86).

Van Manen (1977) has identified three levels of reflectivity. At the first level the focus is on means rather than ends. Educational knowledge and basic curriculum principles are applied in order to attain a given end. Neither the goals nor the institutional contexts of classroom, school, or society are viewed as problematic (posed as problems for questions or debate). The second level

focuses on "an interpretive understanding both of the nature and quality of educational experience." At this second level every educational action appears to be based on particular value commitments; thus reflective action includes "analyzing and clarifying individual and cultural experiences, meanings, perceptions, assumptions, prejudgments, and presuppositions." The third and highest of Van Manen's levels of reflectivity focuses on "the question of the worth of knowledge and of the nature of the social conditions necessary for raising the questions of worthwhileness in the first place." At the third level, educational goals, experiences, and activities are judged against the criteria of justice, equality, and freedom. The educational ends and means as well as the surrounding contexts are viewed as problematic.

Miller, Galanter and Pribram (1960) have distinguished levels in thinking and place reflection at the "metacognitive level." Metacognition refers to one's knowledge concerning one's own cognitive processes and products or anything related to them (Flavell, 1976).

Zeichner and Liston (1987) emphasize the preparation of teachers who are both willing and able to reflect on the origins, purposes and consequences of their actions. Zeichner and Liston have conducted ethnographic field studies which support their position.

Green (1978) stressed the importance of reflection in empowering teachers, particularly at what Van Manen would probably term level three reflection. She has written:

> The concern of teacher educators must remain normative, critical, and even political--neither the colleges nor the schools can change the social order. Neither the colleges nor the schools can legislate democracy. But something can be done to empower teachers to reflect upon their own life situations, to speak out in their own ways about the lacks that must be repaired; the possibilities to be acted upon in the name of what they deem decent, humane, and just (p 71).

Reflection promises to be a wave of the future to enhance the quality of teacher education in the next decade and century.

BYU's Program

At Brigham Young University, elementary education faculty are developing a program to improve reflective thinking skills in preservice students. Reflective teaching components are part of the beginning professional course, Introduction to Teaching and Learning. These components include:

a. Being taught about the theory and process of reflection.

b. Participating in selected microteaching episodes, using Cruickshank's model of reflective teaching.

c. Reflecting on the classroom teaching performance of teachers, peers, and self in both open reflections and theme focused reflections (explained below). Themes have included direct instruction, indirect instruction, questioning, classroom control and management. Other themes incorporate principles of "effective teaching" such as clarity, variety, on task orientation, engagement in the learning task, and moderate to high success rate.

d. Writing reflection reports. We are experimenting with both formal and informal methods of reporting. An example of an informal method is a daily entry in a personal journal, describing experiences and concerns, successes and failures, and future plans.

More formal methods have included (1) oral reports to supervisors after a classroom visit, and (2) a written report after observing a teaching episode.

In oral reports, students (1) describe what they did, (2) present their rationale for what they did, (3) interpret and label their actions according to theory presented in the class seminar and according to its impact on the learning of children, (4) evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of what they did, and (5) make plans for the future.

The written report, Describe, Interpret, Evaluate and Plan (DIEP) is used for either open or focused reflecting. In an open reflection the student choose the theme upon which to focus. A closed reflection is one in which the instructor has assigned a focus. After observing a teaching episode, students describe as objectively as possible the teaching environment, what the teacher did, and the impact on learners. Students interpret their observations, using labels and terms taught in class seminars. They hypothesize about the impact of teacher behaviors or environmental factors on student learning. They evaluate their observations, indicating what went well and what could be improved. Finally, they make suggestions for future planning. Instructions for writing a DIEP and the DIEP Rating Scale are attached in Appendix A.

e. Working in cooperative teams. Students are paired, or may work in larger groups (which may include a cooperating teacher). Student pairs or teams reflect on the teaching practices of self, peers, or the cooperating teacher, using the input of the broader group to improve teaching practice.

Outcome Research

Outcome research on the impact of these practices is currently being conducted. A formal experiment is investigating the effects of structured reflection (DIEP) as compared with less structured journal writing on the quality of written reflections and on classroom teaching performance. Also, student attitudes toward structured reflection is being assessed. We are conducting ethnographic research on students who have completed the professional sequence of preservice courses and are in their final student teaching experience. We will compare more mature students' ability to reflect, and their attitudes toward reflection, with those of beginning students. We will also compare the reflective ability of inservice teachers with that of preservice teachers.

While the research has not been completed, we have some preliminary findings and tentative hypotheses from our observations and student surveys:

1. Nearly all students report finding reflection useful in improving their teaching.

2. Students are divided on whether an open reflection is more useful than a focusedreflection. The purpose of the reflection may determine the preference.

3. Nearly all students prefer oral reflections with their supervisor to written reflections. A current study will provide additional information on student perceptions regarding these methods.

4. Students report gaining equally from observing others and from observing themselves.

5. The majority of students prefer reflecting with someone else rather than reflecting alone.

6. When reflecting with others, students prefer working with their college supervisor or

their cooperating teacher to working with their peers or with a roommate or spouse.

7. After learning about reflection, most students report that they reflect after each teaching episode. A few reported reflecting only when required to do so.

8. Most students report that they actually implement plans made during reflection.

9. Most students like receiving feedback from both their college supervisor and their cooperating teacher.

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